

Maryland's Influenza Sentinel Provider Program

What is an influenza sentinel provider?

An influenza sentinel provider gathers information about influenza-like illness (ILI) in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Data reported by sentinel providers about ILI in their patients, along with other influenza surveillance data, are used to compile a national picture of influenza activity. Across the country, more than 1800 sentinel providers participated during the recent influenza season.

Who can be an influenza sentinel provider?

A provider of any clinical specialty (e.g., family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, infectious diseases, emergency medicine, etc.) in any practice setting (e.g., private practice, public health clinic, urgent care center, emergency room, university student health center) is welcome to register as a sentinel provider.

What data does a sentinel provider collect? How and to whom are data reported?

Each week during the reporting season, a sentinel provider reports five items of summary data from their practice:

1. The total number of patients seen that week and
- 2-5. The numbers of patients with findings consistent with clinical ILI within four age groups (0-4 years; 5-24 y; 25-64 years; and ≥ 65 years).

These data are transmitted early the following week to CDC, either by fax or Internet. NOTE: No individually identified information or lab testing result is to be reported.

Why volunteer to become a sentinel provider?

The most important use of data contributed by sentinel providers is detecting threats to the public's health from influenza virus infections. Human influenza infections cause substantial morbidity and mortality almost every winter (approximately 36,000 deaths annually from 1990-1999, and more than 220,000 hospitalizations annually from 1979-2001, according to recent CDC figures). Influenza viruses continue to evolve both in human beings and in other species. Data from sentinel providers, in combination with other influenza surveillance data, can be used to guide prevention and control activities, inform vaccine strain selection, and trigger clinical alerts for the protection of patients and healthcare providers.

In addition, if you enroll as a sentinel provider in Maryland, DHMH staff will check to see if you might be interested in free subscriptions to CDC's "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" and to CDC's "Emerging Infectious Diseases" journal.

For more information on Influenza Sentinel Provider Surveillance, please contact the state influenza surveillance coordinator, at 410-767-6700.

